



Adolescent ecstasy and other drug use in the National Survey of Parents and Youth: The role of sensation-seeking, parental monitoring and peer's drug use

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Abstract

The association between high sensation-seeking, close friends' drug use and low parental monitoring with ecstasy (MDMA) use in adolescence was examined in a sample of US household-dwelling adolescents aged 12–18 years ($N=5049$). We also tested whether associations were of stronger magnitude than associations between these correlates and marijuana or alcohol/tobacco use in adolescence. Data from Round 2 of the National Survey of Parents and Youth (NSPY) Restricted Use Files (RUF) was analyzed via Jackknife weighted multinomial logistic regression models. High sensation-seekers were more likely to be ecstasy, marijuana, and alcohol/tobacco users, respectively, as compared to low sensation-seekers. High sensation-seeking and close friends' drug use were more strongly associated with ecstasy as compared to marijuana and alcohol/tobacco use. Low parental monitoring was associated with marijuana use and alcohol/tobacco use and there was a trend for it to be associated with ecstasy use. Ecstasy use is strongly associated with peer drug use and more modestly associated with high sensation-seeking. School prevention programs should target high-sensation-seeking adolescents and also encourage them to affiliate with non-drug using peers.

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Keywords: Ecstasy (MDMA) use; Sensation-seeking; Peer drug use; Parental monitoring

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1. Introduction

Prevalence of ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, MDMA) use among adolescents has increased in recent years. Data from the Monitoring the Future study (MTF) show that ecstasy use peaked among 12th grade students in 2001 (12% lifetime and 9% past year). In 2006 6% and 4% of 12th grade students had already used ecstasy in their lifetime and in the past year, respectively, and these rates are still of concern (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2007). The most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that 1.6% of adolescents aged 12–17 years old were lifetime ecstasy users in 2004 (SAMSHA, 2006). While studies have shown that high sensation-seeking, peer drug use and low parental monitoring are associated with illegal drug use (Donohew et al., 1999; Yanovitsky, 2005; Chilcoat, Dishion, & Anthony, 1995), little is known about their associations with ecstasy use relative to associations with drugs like marijuana, and alcohol/tobacco. This study aims to estimate these associations in a representative sample of adolescents from the general US population.

We chose to study the combined association of proximal risk factors such as high sensation-seeking, peer drug use and low parental monitoring with ecstasy use based on three well known theoretical developmental frameworks: Problem Behavior Theory (Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Jessor, 1987, 1998), generality of deviance theory (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1994), and Social Development Model (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). In the Problem Behavior Theory there are three domains of psychosocial influence: personality (values, expectations, beliefs, attitudes toward self and others, sensation-seeking), environment (parental and family support, peer influence) and behavior (problem-behavior: e.g., marijuana use, problem drinking, precocious sexual intercourse; conventional behavior: academic achievement and church attendance), which together specify if an individual is prone to engage in behaviors that depart from the social norms (Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Jessor, 1987). Hirschi and Gottfredson's (1994) generality of deviance theory speculates that all deviance occurs in individuals who lack self-control and seek immediate pleasure (e.g., high sensation-seekers) without thinking about the risk of long term consequences. High sensation-seeking may impair judgment and decision making, leading an individual to take more risks such as engaging in drug use. Lastly, the Social Development Model (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) incorporates propositions of social control, social learning and differential association theories into a developmental framework of both prosocial and antisocial behaviors (White et al., 2006). According to this model, when adolescents develop bonds with individuals or groups with antisocial beliefs (e.g., drug-using peers), they are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors; if they develop bonds with individual with prosocial behaviors (e.g., non-drug using peers, high religiosity), they are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviors, and more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors. Also, external constraints such as parental monitoring and individual factors such as sensation-seeking, can affect these socialization experiences (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Lonczak et al., 2001; White et al., 2006).

High sensation-seeking has been largely associated with drug use, polydrug use and early-onset of drug use in adolescence (Bates, Labouvie, & White, 1986; Pedersen, 1991; D'Silva, Harrington, Palmgreen, Donohew, & Lorch, 2001; Hoyle, Stephenson, Palmgreen, Lorch, & Donohew, 2002; Martin et al., 2002; Crawford, Pentz, Chou, Li, & Dwyer, 2003; Stephenson, Hoyle, Palmgreen, & Slater, 2003; Gerra et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2004, Yanovitsky, 2005). Sensation-seeking is a biologically based trait defined by Zuckerman as "the need for varied, novel and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experiences" (Zuckerman, 1979, p. 10). Sensation-seeking usually peaks in late-adolescence and then declines with age (Zuckerman, 1994). Even though it

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